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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000030

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SENSITIVE
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DEPT PLEASE PASS HHS AND CDC

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TAGS: [KFLU](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [CASC](#) [AMED](#) [ASEC](#) [SENV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: WEST BENGAL AI SITREP - 10: JANUARY 25: AI CONTINUES RAPID
SPREAD WITH CASES CONFIRMED IN TWO NEW DISTRICTS

REF: A) KOLKATA 0028 B) KOLKATA 0027 C) KOLKATA 0025 AND PREVIOUS

KOLKATA 00000030 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On January 25 the presence of the Avian Influenza (AI) virus in poultry was confirmed in two more districts in W. Bengal -- Howrah and Purulia. This makes 11 districts now affected by AI out of a total of 18 in the state. In the evening of January 24, GOWB Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya called an emergency meeting to assess the bird flu situation in the state and asked for an effective strategy to prevent the entry of poultry into Kolkata from the affected districts. The Minister for Animal Resources Department (ARD), however, said that preventing smuggling would be difficult and that the virus could enter the city within a couple of days. Through January 24, according to the GOWB, approximately 800,000 birds had been culled in eight out of the 11 affected districts by 583 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs). Culling operations could not be carried out in Malda district on January 24, reportedly due to inadequate protective gear for the cullers. Reports of significant numbers of poultry deaths have come in from another district - Jalpaiguri in northern W. Bengal. So far, no/no suspected human AI cases have been detected, and health workers are conducting house-to-house surveillance in the virus-hit districts. Detailed GOWB statistics are available at two GOWB websites listed in paragraph 7. Consulate Kolkata also held a town hall meeting on AI for AmCits and staff. The presence of AI in two more districts is further indication of the virus' rapid spread in West Bengal and of the state authorities' inability to control this AI outbreak. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On January 25 the High Security Animal Disease Laboratory in Bhopal confirmed the presence of the H5N1 virus in samples sent from two new districts in W. Bengal - Howrah and Purulia. Howrah district is adjacent to Kolkata across the Hooghly River and includes Kolkata's sister city of Howrah. Howrah city is West Bengal's second largest urban center with a population of over one million people. The presence of AI in Howrah district is a disturbing indication that AI continues to move closer to the Kolkata-Howrah urban conurbation, which has a population of almost 20 million people. Purulia is a rural western district bordering the state of Jharkhand. On January 24, GOWB Chief Minister Bhattacharjee held an emergency meeting in Kolkata to assess the AI outbreak. He called for an action plan to prevent

poultry from AI-affected districts being smuggled into Kolkata. ARD Minister Anisur Rehman said it would be a difficult task to prevent smuggling of poultry into the city from the neighboring flu affected districts, but that his department had sealed the entry points into the city and it was now up to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation to ensure that no virus affected bird appeared in the city's markets. CM Bhattacharjee directed GOWB Home Secretary P.R. Ray to implement the strategy.

13. (U) By the end of January 24, state ARD reported that approximately 800,000 birds were culled by 583 RRTs across eight of the now 11 flu-affected districts. In Birbhum district, on January 24, for the first time the daily culling total crossed the 100,000 mark as ARD teams culled 125,000 birds in Margram and Rampurhat areas. ARD officials attributed the increased efficiency in their operations to a change in strategy - instead of starting early in the morning, they are now starting late - around 1200 noon. The teams are continuing with culling operations after sundown and are finding more poultry back in their pens during those hours. Cold weather, accompanied by rain, has affected culling operations, but not significantly. News reports stated that culling operations could not commence in Malda district due to insufficient availability of protective gear for culling teams. Reports of resistance to culling from poultry owners continue to trickle in from some districts. The Hindustan Times wrote that culling teams faced stiff opposition in Bolpur-Sriniketan (Birbhum district) on the first day of culling in that area. In the same district, in Kanachi village, teams turned back without culling any birds because of local resistance from villagers. (Comment: In some cases, villagers have been unwilling to hand over poultry due to dissatisfaction with the level of compensation and the general lack of awareness about the risks of AI. End Comment.)

14. (U) The Jalpaiguri district in North Bengal, bordering Cooch Behar, may soon be an AI-affected site. 250 birds have reportedly died since the night of January 23 in Magurmari, Sakuwajhora and Baharagararia villages in the Dhuburi block in

KOLKATA 00000030 002.2 OF 002

Jalpaiguri. An ARD department official told Post that on January 24 some areas around Jalpaiguri town had been scheduled for culling after they reported unusual poultry mortality. (Comment: The pre-emptive culling indicates that the authorities suspect the possibility of H5N1, although not confirmed by test results. End Comment.)

15. (U) According to available statistics from the GOWB, through January 23 medical teams have surveyed 590,000 people in the affected districts. A total of 2,446 cases of fever have been detected, none of which demonstrated clinical symptoms of AI. Fifteen human samples collected (South Dinajpur - five, Murshidabad - two and Birbhum - eight) through January 23 and sent for testing have all returned negative. GOWB Director of Health Services Dr. Sanchita Bakshi informed Post that 3979 cullers have been examined and 24 had fevers. The test results that have been received so far are all negative for AI, and an additional eight human samples were sent for testing to NIV Pune on January 24. She confirmed that all cullers and health workers are taking chemoprophylaxis. Dr. Bakshi said that fever and colds are common at this time of the year and she expects that all the samples sent for testing to come back be negative for AI. Dr. Bakshi maintained that, "the situation is under control," and again confirmed no suspected case of human AI has been detected so far.

16. (U) A press release issued by the state Health Department on January 24 stated that isolation observation wards have been set up in each affected district. Fourteen ventilators have been installed at those facilities along with other necessary equipment. The Department has also directed the district health authorities in unaffected districts to identify health facilities where isolation wards could be opened, and if necessary, to equip them with essential amenities. (Comment: Medical facilities in the state's rural areas are generally very poor and so isolations wards will likely be inadequate if human

AI cases do occur. End Comment.) The Infectious Disease hospital, where the NICED lab is located, in Kolkata has been identified as the state's hub hospital.

¶17. (U) Information material, guidelines, forms and protocols and important documents related to Avian Influenza have been made available to the general public by the state government at the website www.wbhealth.gov.in. Daily press releases on the bird flu situation are available at HYPERLINK "<http://www.wbgov.com>" www.wbgov.com.

¶18. (U) On January 25, Consulate Kolkata held a town hall meeting at the American Center to inform staff and as an additional outreach to AmCits about the AI outbreak. ConGen, MinCouns for Consular Affairs - Embassy New Delhi, and Embassy Regional Medical Officer provided AmCits and Consulate staff and family members with an overview of the AI situation in W. Bengal and answered questions related to precautionary and protective measures.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: The confirmation of two new districts affected by AI in W. Bengal indicates that AI continues to spread throughout the state and culling efforts have not been sufficient. The presence of AI in Howrah means that the disease is now close to the state's major urban center. The large population of the Howrah-Kolkata metropolitan region, potentially increases exponentially human exposure to the disease if it manifests in the numerous urban markets and poultry shops.
JARDINE